

ALTERNATIVE D: SHARING DELTA HERITAGE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The information age and the technology currently available for communicating and sharing information with a wide audience presents opportunities for establishing a Delta Heritage Information Network. The network would disseminate information on the rich natural, cultural, and historical legacy of the Delta, nationally and internationally, through the Internet, interactive computer programs and CD technology. In this alternative technology would become the vehicle for stimulating heritage tourism in the Lower Mississippi Delta for the 21st century and beyond.

This alternative proposes a two track approach to disseminating heritage information about the Delta. The first track would focus on reaching Delta residents through schools, public libraries, and communities. This track would especially target less prosperous Delta areas where Internet access is less common. The second track would target a national and international audience seeking heritage preservation and tourism information about the Delta.

VISITOR EXPERIENCE

The 10 concepts based on the "Stories of the Delta" would remain the basis for developing computer, video, and audio program, posters, and brochures for this alternative. Students and visitors would use various technologies to "experience" the Delta or to plan trips to the region to experience it first-hand.

ORIENTATION/INFORMATION

Unlike the first three alternatives, visitors to the Delta would explore the region via computers at local libraries, visitor centers, schools, community centers, and/or at home. The rich heritage of the Delta would be presented in such a way as to stimulate people to learn more about the area and to subsequently make vacation plans to visit some of the places they have visited on the Internet or through other computer programs.

The Internet sites would provide information, in entertaining and creative ways, on museums, cultural centers, and communities in the Delta and present the stories of the Delta as reflected in the 10 concepts developed in this study.

The network would be updated regularly and spotlight different stories, concepts, and sites at different times of the year. Like the other alternatives the Delta Heritage Information Network would focus on the entire Delta and would relate stories and sites within a regional context.

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

Interpretation

An integrated and interchangeable system of computer and Internet programs would be developed to implement this alternative. Current and everchanging and improving graphic technology would allow exciting new ways to present the Delta's rich heritage.

"Chat rooms" would allow ongoing dialogue and lively debates about the people, places, and events that have made the Delta a vital part of our national character. Exciting graphics and Delta games would challenge visitors to learn more about the Delta and its people and would offer opportunities for integrating the information into educational programs.

It is envisioned that once visitors to the Delta Heritage Network were introduced to the richness of this vast and exciting region, they would want to explore the region for themselves and would make plans to visit some of the places and people that had "experienced" on the network.

In addition to the interpretive information presented, as a part of each program, auto, boat, bike, and hiking tour information would also be presented and travelers would be able to secure reservations for hotels, performances, and tours in the region. Video, CDS, and cassette tapes would be developed to

make a wide variety of media available to all visitors.

The Delta Heritage Information Network could become a vital part of education programs within and outside the Delta region at all levels of education. Graduate students at universities, colleges, and community colleges throughout the Delta could be challenged through a design competition to design educational curriculum for the Internet. Other students, including adult learners, could develop oral histories and accompanying graphics to help preserve the heritage of older Delta residents.

Students from several schools could combine their skills and creative ideas to develop criteria for creating Delta heritage programs to ensure that they are 'user friendly' and accessible for all school districts and students in the Delta.

Students in business, marketing, and tourism related studies could be called upon to develop ways to market and distribute the information of the network.

RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

The natural, cultural, and historic resources of the Delta remain the stimulus for creating a Delta Heritage Information Network. The network would present, in graphic and creative ways, strategies for local organizations, historic sites, museums, natural resource sites, and private landowners to protect and preserve the region's resources. Information would be presented that would tell those interested where they could obtain technical assistance, grants, or other important information.

The network would present various topics and would explore them in-depth on resource stewardship on a monthly basis. The network would also present a 'chat room' where questions and issues could be addressed online.

The flexibility of the Internet and online opportunities could help sites and

organizations improve their resource protection and preservation efforts.

FACILITY DEVELOPMENT

This alternative proposes development of a Delta Heritage Information Network using Internet and other computer technologies. No new development is recommended as part of this alternative.

MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The Delta Heritage Information Network would be managed through a Delta Heritage Information Center. The director of the center would be responsible for organizing, staffing, and implementing the network. Staff would include at least one education/interpretive specialist experienced in developing Internet sites, computer programs and graphic designs. The center would work closely with the region's universities and colleges to identify and use subject matter experts in Delta history, natural resources, folkways, and heritage preservation.

The center could contract for development of multimedia products such as CD-ROM, videos, brochures, and/or posters and tapes. The center could develop cooperative agreements with local and regional organizations interested in furthering educational and interpretive programs through technology and would work closely with education departments to ensure the widest possible access to Delta heritage programs.

Functions

The Delta Heritage Information Center would have a formalized management structure to define roles and responsibilities and coordinate efforts. The center would have a director and its own staff skilled in computer technologies and marketing.

The center would be responsible for (1) organizing and implementing a Delta Heritage

Information Network; (2) serving as a clearing house of information on Delta heritage tourism initiatives and projects; (3) developing a Delta Heritage Internet site and appropriate Delta heritage computer educational and interpretive programs; (4) developing standards and criteria for heritage related information programs within the Delta; (5) coordinating with education departments, colleges, and universities to ensure the widest distribution of information (6) coordinating heritage tourism information nationally and internationally with other concerned agencies and organizations in the Delta; and (7) preparing a 10-year strategic plan that would also identify long-term funding strategies to support the information network.

Funding

The Delta Heritage Information Center would receive federal funding for organization and implementation of the Delta Heritage Information Network for five years after authorization and appropriation of funds from Congress. The center would develop a 10-year strategic plan for continuing the network's ongoing projects and programs in the private sector, perhaps through a private/nonprofit organization.

Federal funds would be used for initial computer purchase and set-up, staffing, graphic/Internet contractors, and administrative requirements.

Estimated Costs

It is estimated that the federal cost for startup, equipment purchase, staffing, and contacting services would be approximately \$165,000 for the first year. Maintenance of the network for five years would be approximately \$380,000 for a total for setup and maintenance for 5 years of \$545,000. The cost of contracting for multimedia products (CD-ROM, videos, posters, brochures, etc.) produced over five years would be approximately \$820,000. The total federal cost to implement this alternative would be \$1,365,000.